trade arbitration council, customs operation and harmonization of standards and measurements. All these trade facilitation measures are aimed at operationalizing SAFTA. Pakistan was a part of consensus reached during the Standing Committee deliberations at Kathmandu. Pakistan would be expected to cooperate in fully implementing the entire package of issues before the next Summit so as to make it meaningful.

While there is no well defined proposal for a South Asian Union on the table, India has declared its readiness to enter into discussions to work towards such a union, Pakistan has not reacted positively to this idea so far.

Attacks on Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy

1270. SHRI R. KAMARAJ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the frequent attacks on the Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy causing great difficulties for Indian fishermen, especially from Nagapatinam and Rameswaram;

(b) whether Government have received any representation from fishermen association to solve this problem; and

(c) if so, what remedies are proposed by Government to solve this problem?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The High Commission in Colombo received information that four fishermen who left Akkaraipettai village, Nagapattinam, in a catamaran for fishing at Pushpavanam were allegedly fired upon by the Sri Lankan Navy on 1st April, 2003, resulting in injury to one fisherman. When taken up by the High Commission, both the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and the Sri Lankan Navy denied having any role in the incident, stating that none of their patrol crafts was in that location on that day.

(b) Government does receive representations from various fishermen's associations following the apprehension of Indian fishermen at sea.

(c)The Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka agree that the problem of fishermen straying into each other's waters should

be resolved in a humane and practical way. Indian fishermen straying into Sri Lankan waters are sometimes apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and Sri Lankan fishermen's associations. The apprehended fishermen are treated humanely and repatriated quickly with facilitation from our High Commission in Colombo and the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Simplifying procedure for Issue of passports

1271. DR. ABRAR AHMED:
SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that police verification of applicants is one of the major reasons causing delay in the issuing of passports to them in a stipulated period; and

(b) if so, how Government propose to simplify this procedure?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) The Passport authorities are in regular interaction with the State Governments to expedite the Police Verification Reports. Coordination Committee at State level headed by Home Secretary have been constituted to, *inter alia,* ensure expeditious police verifications. The Government have also taken up the issue of expediting the police verification reports at other high levels in State Governments.

Strategic dialogue between India and UAE

1272. SHRI VAYALAR RAVI:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether in a diplomatic breakthrough, India and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to a framework of strategic dialogue for the first time;

(b) if so, what are the main issues on which both the countries have agreed to help each other;